

Appleby Archaeology Group

The Archaeology of Westmorland Villages

The first Lecture of the autumn season by Tom Clare left the Appleby Archaeology Group and visitors intrigued and stimulated to find out more about their local villages.

Mr Clare began by emphasising that although a third of Medieval villages had been deserted, two thirds had not. He suggested that it was in, around or underneath today's villages that evidence of the past life of villages should be looked for.

He identified features to look for. These included cockpits, archery butts, maypoles of which a good example is found at Warcop. In addition there may stocks, village pounds, many of which are being preserved, and cross bases such as the one at Great Ormside.

Buildings provide much information. Cross-passage houses which developed from the Medieval long house, predominate in the Eden Valley. Many examples can be seen today. Outside walls are, and were normally rendered or lime washed concealing architectural and archaeological features so that external appearance may give little indication of origins. Date stones may also be misleading as the date may refer to alteration to the house. Many cross-passage houses were quite grand and

are likely to have been occupied by yeoman. Single storey cottages with two rooms, one for the animals, are evident at the edge of villages and are different status buildings.

Some villages had manor houses, in Crosby Ravensworth earth works show a moated house. Many villages have a hall which refers to the largest house in the village, not necessarily the manor house. Churches are not found in all villages as some stood on link roads, some are similar suggesting that they had the same architect builder, for example the churches at Crosby Garrett and Bolton.

Artefacts such as coins and pottery, found in houses, middens, and fields give clues to date, occupation and life style. An example given was the finding of copper needles under a window sill at Yealand Redmayne, they must have fallen through a crevice perhaps when the person sewing stood up.

Mr Clare described in detail the layout of villages and their surrounding field systems. There is little known of what happened in the Medieval period but earthworks suggest that the villages were bigger. Estate plans and Ordnance Survey maps are valuable sources. The linear village common in the Eden Valley, with its houses tofts, back lane and strip fields beyond, has its origins in Medieval times or earlier. Lanes led away to the

unfenced common land, a good example can be seen at Great Asby where hedgerow dating would suggest the lane has been there for 900 years. It was pointed out that footpaths may delineate the extent of the village. Drove ways to common land and beyond are very ancient and many survive in Cumbria and may now only be indicated by surviving boulders.

Villages were probably planned following the destruction of the north after the Norman Conquest. In the 13th and 14th century the population decreased and many villages were deserted though some were resettled later in 18th century when farming technology was changing and population increasing. Village architecture reflects both function and period. The agricultural function of villages of Medieval and Tudor times persisted virtually unchanged, in some instances, to the 1940s. The 19th century sees the growth of industrial villages, the railway village of Tebay and the mining villages of Cleator Moor are examples.

In concluding it was emphasised that there has been a historical evolution of the villages and this can be studied using today as a starting point. The question was posed: how do we best preserve the past to meet the needs of today's village?

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The next meeting of the Appleby Archaeology Society will
be held on Tuesday November 2nd at 7pm, at Appleby
Grammar School

Barbara Harbottle will talk about Medieval Friaries in
the North. She has researched and excavated friaries in
the north.

All are welcome, there is a small charge for non members

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